2: Fortes E-5 (1934-1937) 1945
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No biological or medical research has hitherto been carried out among the Tallensi or their nearest neighbours. Hence it is impossible to determine how far their physique, efficiency, and standard of health have been affected by their low scale of nutrition. To the lay observer they do not appear to be stunted or to show a high incidence of physical defects. They are fortunate in living outside the sleeping-sickness zone, but the common endemic diseases of the region are rife among them. The natives have no reliable remedies for these diseases, and the Government dispensary at Zuarungu, the only regular medical service provided for the district, cannot cope with more than a fraction of the sick. From the point of view of physical health the Tallensi of to-day are probably little better off than their fathers were.

Native habits of dress and personal hygiene are doubtful assets from the point of view of health. Children go stark naked till adolescence, in the case of boys, and till their first pregnancy in the case of girls. Women go naked except for the perineal band. Men always wear a loin-cloth for the sake of modesty, but it is usually grimy with accumulated dirt. In addition, a man usually wears a goatskin or sheepskin, or a ragged remnant of an old tunic or cloth slung across his back, as his working garb; clothes are worn only on special occasions.

Whether or not these customs of dress are injurious, the indifference of the Tallensi to bodily cleanliness cannot be beneficial to their health. By European or Coast African standards, the Tallensi and their neighbours are dirty people. They wash only rarely, especially in the dry season. This is due, in part, to the scarcity of water and to the fact that soap is still an expensive luxury, but also in some measure to native ideas of cleanliness. Tallensi do not object to body dirt. Only young dandies and marriageable girls take pride in a 'clean skin' as a mark of beauty and wash regularly. It is not surprising, therefore, that the most superficial wounds usually fester.

The sanitary habits of the natives are equally primitive. A homestead is usually kept fairly clean indoors, but the live-stock yard is inside the homestead, and the accumulation of manure there, as well as the refuse midden just outside the entrance, are the breeding-places of swarms of flies. Then, also, the natives defecate just outside their homesteads. The stench around a Tale homestead in the rainy season is enough to shake the hardiest anthropologist. These noisome accompaniments of home-life do not trouble the natives, who look upon animal manure and human excrement as essential fertilizers for their farms.

In spite of these hardships and hazards Tallensi set a very high value on their culture and way of life. In his workaday life the native gives an impression of being a steady, sober person with a good grip of himself. He can work hard if necessary, but he can enjoy idleness too. Wasteful and extravagant at times, especially on certain ceremonial occasions, he is normally frugal and abstemious. A keen sense of property and of the value of material goods goes with generosity to kinsfolk and friends. Though he is no stickler for the letter of custom, he attaches great importance to social rights and obligations. Respect for social and genealogical superiors is a strong point of Tale etiquette, but natives are rarely

3: Fortes E-5 (1934-1937) 1949
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351 ingress of wild animals—in particular, the ubiquitous and thievish hyena, which prowls the settlements at night in search of offal and unprotected small stock—and the egress of their own livestock. Every [622] gateway in Taleland must be barred at night, except that of the Chief of Tongo. This is a strict rule, and it is one of the conventions defining the social personality of the Chief of Tongo. It is also a sign of the privacy of the domestic unit in respect of the intimate life of its members.

351 Entering the *zanɔr* of a homestead, the visitor finds himself in the *sapak* or *nayaŋ*, the cattle-yard. It is the dirtiest and most insanitary 556 spot in the homestead, its undressed surface being strewn with rubbish 231 and with the dung or droppings of livestock, if the owner has any. [514] One often sees human excrement in a corner, for young children and sick people defecate there at night. Ɔndieso is a very poor man, even by Tale standards, as the sagging roofs and dilapidated walls of his homestead lead one to suspect, possessing neither cattle nor sheep nor goats, and but a handful of poultry. Hence his *sapak* is very small, less than a dozen square yards in area. Ɔndieso's neighbour, the Gbizug tɛndaana, has a large *sapak*, about 80 square yards in area; but he has cattle, sheep, goats, and a couple of donkeys, not to speak of many fowls and guinea-fowls.

[361] From the *sapak* one can see how the cylindrical rooms are laid out and distributed in the roughly circular or oval area occupied by the 342 homestead. The first room, usually on the right as one enters through the *zanɔr*, is the *zɔŋ*. It is the only room with a doorway in the *sapak*, and it has a special significance in the structure of the house. It is the room *par excellence* of the head of the house (*yirdaana*), fittingly placed between the open space before the *zanɔr*, with which his public activities are associated, and the *sapak*, which shelters his most valuable possessions, his livestock. Cattle, sheep, and goats constitute material wealth, [556] the repository of labour and thrift; but they mean much more than that to the Talaŋ. They are pre-eminently the property of men, associated with men's major interests. They are the medium by means of which wives are acquired, and thus posterity assured. They are also the [782] principal objects of sacrifice, by means of which the natives maintain their relations with their ancestor spirits and other mystical powers. In bad weather the *zɔŋ* itself is used to shelter the livestock. Inside the *zɔŋ*, along the wall, little cubicles are made for the *yirdaana*'s fowls to nest in. A man of substance often has a double *zɔŋ*, consisting of two chambers with a low doorway in the partition wall. The rear chamber is used as a stall for young calves or sheep, and the front chamber, communicating with the *sapak*, as a stall for a milch-cow or a donkey, for the night.

342 The *zɔŋ* is identified with the *yirdaana*'s status and social personality. 778 It is a bare room, for a man does not keep valuable possessions, weapons,

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me in her mother's room'. The other categories are blurred; any adult of the domestic group is described as a 'mother' or 'father'.

During these first three or four years a child's father, though he sees less of it than its mother does, is as loving and indulgent a parent. A baby can do no wrong; for, as Tallensi say, 'it has no sense (*u ka yam*)'. I have seen an infant screaming in a tantrum or nagging tiresomely at its mother while she was too busy with a household task, such as cooking, to attend to it, and its father come in and carry it off to soothe it. What discipline or frustration of impulse a child encounters in this period comes mainly from its mother or a young nursemaid. For example until it can drink by itself, an infant is regularly given a drink (*yuh*, causative from *yu*, to drink), at least once daily, usually when it is bathed. This is an item of hygiene with a quasi-magical stamp. The fluid may be plain water, unboiled or previously boiled and cooled down; or it may be a decoction of roots (*yaya*), the generic term for any vegetable products used in Tale leechcraft and medicine. Its composition is prescribed by the child's spirit guardian (*sɔyɔr*). After its bath the mother lays the child on her lap facing sideways, holds her cupped hand to its mouth, and pours the drink from a small calabash into the babe's mouth. It splutters and chokes, kicks and screams with rage, but the liquid is poured down its throat relentlessly.

Until they can run about by themselves Tale children are not expected to be house-clean. By the age of 3, however, most of them have learnt to run outside to defecate during the day and to ask to be taken outside in the night. They are still apt to micturate indoors wherever they may happen to be. Tallensi do not inculcate clean habits by direct training or by punishing faults in a child. A child acquires cleanliness by a gradual process of habituation[1] and social maturation as its general self-control, its powers of locomotion and of speech, and its identifications with adults grow. But if a small child, already accustomed to run outside, has an accident indoors, it is likely to be rebuked by one of the adults, most probably its mother or an older sibling.

It is also the mother who stands for the most serious deprivation the child experiences up to the age of weaning, the loss of the breast. There is nothing in their folk-lore or customs suggesting that the Tallensi have anything but the most matter-of-fact attitude towards the female breast. I have seen a man, with that utter lack of squeamishness characteristic of most Tallensi, when treating his brother's wife for inability to nurse her baby, himself suck at her breast in order to test the flow of milk. But there is a custom which hints that the mother's breast is felt to be a special symbol of motherhood. If a woman is very grievously affronted by her grown-up son or daughter, and she takes hold of her breast and says, 'I suffered to bear you and this is how you treat me

[1] Described in my *Social and Psychological Aspects of Education in Taleland* as a response to the expectation of normal behaviour.

5: Fortes E-5 (1934-1937)1938 FE11 Tallensi FE11

828 situation everybody takes it for granted that any person participating either already knows, or wants to know, how to behave in a manner appropriate to the situation and in accordance with his level of maturity. An effort to learn is thus evoked as an adaptation to the demands of a real situation. It is not that people expect one another [183 to act with automatic and machine-like precision; for in point of fact 876] Tale culture tolerates considerable elasticity in the patterns of behaviour. We have an analogy in our own culture in the expectation entertained by most adults that little girls want to play with dolls and little boys with toy engines. We act on this expectation whenever we buy presents for children. How exactly this influences the play of Western children has not been investigated, but there can be little doubt that it does. We expect children to know how to play without being taught.

863 In contrast to this, many Western mothers nowadays do not expect their children to acquire clean habits simply in the normal course of development, and therefore set out to train them deliberately from earliest infancy in these habits. Tale mothers never train their children deliberately to be clean. When they reach the stage of walking and talking easily, children are expected not to defecate indoors in the daytime but to be asked to be taken outside or to run out themselves. A lapse meets with an expression of disapproval and a reprimand: 'You are big enough already. Can't you go outside to defecate?' 868 The child learns in response to the expectation that it is capable of 198 normal behaviour in that respect.[1] Similarly, infants are expected to

[1] The example is intended to illustrate how the expectation of normal behaviour acts but, of course, other factors are also involved in the Tale child's acquisition of clean habits. These habits are learnt gradually, not all at once. Before it can walk or talk, its mother or an older child sometimes takes it outside when it shows signs of wishing to defecate. By the time it is expected to be clean it is being drawn into the play-activities of slightly older children, most of which take place out of doors. The need to adapt itself to the habits and standards of its older playmates is a strong stimulus to the child to learn not only bowel and bladder control but also the rules [576 of etiquette. As the Tallensi have no special sanitary arrangements, but excrete 514] in the open anywhere near the homestead, taking care only to keep a little way from the paths and from any people who may be about, it is easy for a child to learn the adult convention from the example of older children and adults. Clean habits, like other skills, are learnt as organic responses (see below, p. 10). I shall refer to this matter again, in another context, in a later section.